

THE NORSEMAN



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THE NORSEMAN

THE NORSEMAN

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS BY
ELIZABETH ALDEN CURTIS



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ELIZABETH ALDEN CURTIS
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*This tale, that runs not smooth, of two who loved,—
Of two who loved transcendently, and so
Turned the gods' eyes upon them, and drew down
Hatreds, and obstacles, and plotted woe,
E'en such as all the great, dead lovers knew,
Ere they beheld and reached their final goal,
Ere, in the twilight portals of the stars,
Rejoined they each his dear, divided soul,—
Not singly stands this tale! No perfect thing
Earth's envy spares, nor spares fate's black despite!
So 't was ordained, for Love's high 'venturers,
To tread the dim abysses of the night,
Onward, by Aengus and fair Edain, led;
Maddened by visions, hemmed by phantoms 'round;
Yet blessed beyond earth's easeful votaries,—
Love-loosed from all things lesser than the sound
Of their own vows, breathed on the moon-bright air;
Veiled, as was Forgael, from the blight of time,
Enmeshed, at last, in sweet Dectora's hair!*

February 5, 1912.

PREFATORY NOTE

THE drama of THE NORSEMAN, adheres as closely as possible to the story of Frithiof and Ingeborg, as it was told in the ancient *Frithiof Saga*, of which the following is a brief extract:

"In Sognefylke, near the holy grove of Balder, dwelt King Bele; two sons had he, Helge and Halfdan, and moreover a daughter, Ingeborg the Fair. When he came to die, Bele warned his sons to keep up friendship with the mighty Frithiof, a son of his friend, Thorsten, who was the son of Viking. But the young kings refused scornfully Frithiof's wooing for their sister's hand, and so he vowed revenge, and that he never would come to their assistance.

"Soon after, it came to pass that when King Ring made war against them, they sent to ask aid from Frithiof: he was playing chess, and let himself not be one whit disturbed by their messenger.

"Ring conquered, and made the brothers promise Ingeborg's hand to him.

"Meanwhile Frithiof had gone to see Ingeborg in Balder's temple (which was a forbidden deed) and there he exchanged rings with her; for to him the love of Ingeborg was a far weightier matter than the favor of Balder.

"To punish him for his contempt of the shrine of Balder, the kings laid upon Frithiof the task of going to the Faroes and demanding a tribute. So Frithiof, with his foster brother, set sail in the ship, Ellida, the best in all the North; a ship which all said could understand the voice of men. After suffering shipwreck and enchantment, they reached the Faroes, where Yarl Angantyr let him take the tribute for friendship's sake, and so he departed.

PREFATORY NOTE

“ When he came back, he heard that the kings had burned his dwelling, and that they were just then at the midsummer feast in the grove of Balder. Thither he went, and found few folk within. Frithiof flung the purse with the money in Helge’s face, so that his very teeth fell out ; and then he was going away, when he beheld the ring he had given Ingeborg on the arm of Helge’s queen. He dragged it from her with such force that she fell to the ground ; Balder’s image was thrown into the fire, and the whole temple set in flame. King Helge sought to pursue Frithiof, but his ships had been made useless.

“ Now Frithiof remained an outcast ; so he took to the ocean, and he slew the fierce sea-kings, but let the merchants fare in peace. And so, when he had gained great glory and wealth, he hied him back again to the North, and went disguised as a salt-burner to the court of King Ring. Ring knew him, and pitying his sad tale, commanded that he should be set in the most honourable seat. Queen Ingeborg spake but little with him. One day, Frithiof and the king went out together into a wood, and the king laid him down to sleep ; then Frithiof drew his sword, and threw it away. Then the king told him how that he had known from the first evening who he was.”

There are several endings given, by the mythologists, to this legend. One of the most usually accepted ones has been adapted to the present play. The only decided liberties that have been taken with the story, have been the placing of Ingeborg’s ring on the arm of Balder’s image, instead of upon that of Helge’s queen,—for the purpose of dignifying the scene, and heightening the effect of the sacrilege ; the turning back of the season of Frithiof’s arrival at the court of King Ring, from winter to autumn ; and a general

PREFATORY NOTE

shortening of the events of that period of the Saga into the possible limits of a single stage act.

The lyrics, which occur in the drama, should be set to an almost purely recitative music, which will in no sense impair the spoken value of the words. We know little of the art of those earliest skalds, or harpers, who told stories in song to the romance-loving, heroic peoples of the antique world, but this much must be certain; that the words, themselves, with all the thrilling, impassioned power of spoken language, must have been clearly intelligible, and unhamp-ered by musical embellishment, or the interest of those long, narrative song-poems could never have been sustained. A vibrant chord—a fiery stanza, differing not much from speech, save, perhaps, in its rhythm, and return, on a last word, to music, as if tethered by a golden thread of melody; a minor plaint, accompanied by an arpeggio undertone;—who can suggest or outline the technique of that lost art of story-telling-in-song! Of the songs in the present play, only one, the last, seems suited to anything like a modern musical treatment,—a distinct melody, perhaps, and barcarolle rhythm. The others belong, I am sure, to that far-off day when the singers were the poets, prophets, actors, and historians of the nation, and “a song” must have had an infinitely fuller significance than any that it holds, to-day.

E. A. C.

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

February 2, 1912

THE NORSEMAN

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIGURD RING, King of Ringric

HELGE, } Kings of Sognefylke and Brothers of
HALFDAN, } Ingeborg

THE CROWN PRINCE OF RINGRIC, a Child

A HIGH PRIEST OF BALDER

FRITHIOF, a Free Norseman, son of Thorsten, a Hero,
 whose death has just occurred

BJÖRN, Comrade of Frithiof

HILDING, Foster-father of Frithiof and Ingeborg

BLAETAND

HALVAR, a Jester

HAM, } Two Witches
HEID, }

A SKALD

FIRST WARRIOR

SECOND WARRIOR

FIRST MARINER

SECOND MARINER

AN OLD MAN

HUNVOR, Queen to Helge

THE PRINCESS INGEBORG, Sister of Helge and Halfdan

KRAKE, Ingeborg's Maid-in-Waiting

PRIESTS OF BALDER, WARRIORS, MARINERS, VASSALS
 and MAIDENS

The Play is laid in Iceland, in the period covered by the
poetic Edda

THE SCENES

ACT I. SCENE 1. Framnäs. A Hall in Frithiof's House.

ACT II. SCENE 1. Sognefylke. The Grove of Balder.

SCENE 2. The Sea Coast.

ACT III. SCENE 1. A Road near Sognefylke.

SCENE 2. The Grove of Balder.

ACT IV. SCENE 1. Ringric. The Feasting-Hall in King
Ring's Palace.

SCENE 2. A Terrace outside the Palace.

Four years are supposed to have elapsed between
Acts III and IV.

THE NORSEMAN

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

ACT I

SCENE I. FRAMNÄS. *A Hall in FRITHIOF'S house. The walls are hung with weapons and spoils of the chase. Oak benches, upon which armor is scattered. The floor is strewn with rushes. Although it is early summer, a bright fire burns on the hearth. At the back, a door opening on a birch forest, with a glimpse of the sea beyond.*

A SKALD, heard singing, to the accompaniment of a harp, as the curtain rises, and the twelve warriors of THORSTEN, seated, listening, about the benches. A maid, who has been quietly filling up the mead-horns, goes out before the end of the song.

THE SKALD [*Concluding.*]

DEEPLY, in his rounded grave,
Thorsten sleeps beside the wave;
Thus it is ye shall relate
Thorsten's deeds both good and great.

*Like the snow-kissed Northern pine,
Stood he, in his day's decline;*

THE NORSEMAN

*As the sun, at close of day,
Passed his mighty soul away.*

*Dim with years his mortal sight,
In Valhalla's Hall of Light,
There, forevermore, shall he
Odin's changeless glory see.*

FIRST WARRIOR [*When the music has died away.*]

'T was thus, indeed, great Thorsten lived and died,—
Wearing his valor like a kingly crown!

SECOND WARRIOR

Alas, we shall not see his like again!

FIRST WARRIOR

Unless his spirit wakes in Frithiof.

SECOND WARRIOR

That colt has grazed in scented fields too long!
He needs must feel some strong adversity,
To stir the sweet contentment of his blood.

FIRST WARRIOR

Mayhap the goad is even now prepared!
I fear me that the temper of the King
Will not embrace young Frithiof's overture.

THE NORSEMAN

THE SKALD

What 's this you speak of? I am just returned
To Sognefylke, and the Kingdom's news
Outruns me. What is this of Frithiof?

FIRST WARRIOR

Thou dost recall the life-long covenant
'Twixt Thorsten and King Bele?

THE SKALD

Aye, full well!

FIRST WARRIOR

It was King Bele's wish that his two sons,
Helge and Halfdan, our late-crowned Kings,
And his sweet daughter, Princess Ingeborg,
Should, at his death, maintain, with Frithiof,
The friendship he had shown for Thorsten. So —

SECOND WARRIOR [*Interrupting him.*]

So Frithiof has gone, this very day,
With young Björn, his sworn and chosen friend,
To lay his sword before the Kings of Sogn,
Offering to take his warlike father's place,
And fight the Kingdom's battles.

THE NORSEMAN

FIRST WARRIOR

Furthermore,
He goes,— for this was Bele's true desire,—
To ask her brothers for the Princess' hand.
Thou knowest they were reared in Hilding's house,
Together, with this very end in view.

THE SKALD

"As fond as Frithiof and Ingeborg,"
Was e'er a saying in old Hilding's mouth!
And have these saplings never grown apart?

FIRST WARRIOR

They are so grafted on each other's lives,
I think the natural order is reversed,
And that the tree doth live upon the shoot,
And all its better parts do spring therefrom.

THE SKALD

And what if Helge should refuse this suit?
Men say he has a proud and grudging heart!

SECOND WARRIOR [*Grimly.*]

Why, then will Thorsten's comrades have a word
To say for that which Thorsten held most dear!

[*Striking his sword-hilt, significantly.*]

A word so sharp that even Kings must hear!

THE NORSEMAN

[THE WARRIORS assent, hotly. So intent are they, that BJÖRN enters, and stands in their midst, unnoticed. He is young and golden-haired, and, in spite of his heavy armor, looks like a lad, among the battle-scarred soldiers of Thorsten.]

BJÖRN

An enemy might take you by surprise!
Where are your ears, ye greybeards, and your eyes?

[THE WARRIORS spring up, startled; upon seeing BJÖRN, they surround him, eagerly.]

FIRST WARRIOR

Björn! What! Back so soon? Where's Frithiof?
Come boy, what news? What passed at Helge's court?

BJÖRN [*Darkly.*]

The foulest insult passed that e'er I heard!

[*To THE WARRIORS.*]

'T was well I went with Frithiof, alone!
Had ye been there, ye would have slain the King,
Upon his judging-seat, and thrown the realm
Into a revolution!

[THE WARRIORS crowd closer about him, murmuring excitedly.]

SECOND WARRIOR

Tell us more!
Speak plainly all that thou hast hinted at!

THE NORSEMAN

BJÖRN

Frithiof is close behind me. He but stayed
To see the boat drawn safe upon the shore.
See, here he comes! Now, learn the tale from him!

[FRITHIOF *is seen approaching, through the wood. THE
WARRIORS draw apart, to make way for him, and
salute him, with affection and pride, as he enters.*]

FRITHIOF [*With a show of cheerfulness.*]

Why now, good friends, 't is joy to be at home!
In this sweet circle should all journeys lead,—
From home, toward home; that home may shine more fair
For being glimpsed a-distant, like a star!

FIRST WARRIOR [*Solemnly.*]

With joy do we behold thee, Frithiof,
And do most anxiously await thy news,
If it be good, we 'll publish thy success;
If bad, our hungry swords will follow thee,
To better it,—or be thy liegemen still,
In those bright Halls where Thorsten sits, on high!

[THE WARRIORS *assent, heartily.*]

FRITHIOF

Your loyalty doth touch me to the heart!
The more that, in this hour, my heart is sad,
And all my fortunes crossed and hindered.
For I have met with grave indignity
At hands which I had every right to hope

THE NORSEMAN

Would be outstretched in love, to clasp my own.
I will not further try your patiences ;
It happened thus ; before the Kings of Sogn,
As we agreed, I laid great Thorsten's sword ;
Seeking to join my father's far-famed arms
To Helge's forces ; and I then did sue
For my sweet Princess ; bade them to recall
How 't was our good King Bele's oft-spoke wish
To see us wedded ; by their buried sire,
Did strive to move them to my heart's desire.

[THE WARRIORS *are hushed with attention.*]

They answered me with pride and insolence.
Dark Helge curled his crafty lip with scorn
And bade such high presumption be forgot
As sought to mate with blood of Odin's line,
A royal Princess with a vassal's son.

[THE WARRIORS *murmur, indignantly.*]

While, as for Iceland's battles, — here he smiled
Toward the younger King, — he doubted not
They could be fought without such aid as mine,
But, lest it should be said that they forgot
My father's service, rendered to the King,
I should be welcome to a vassal's place,
To serve them in their palace, or their court.

[*Angry outcries from* THE WARRIORS.]

Whereat, the freeman's blood within my veins
Leaped to avenge its insult, and I drew
My sword with sudden fury, crying out,
“ Had I not journeyed hither, O proud King,

THE NORSEMAN

In such a mind as fits this solemn time,
Filled with the peace that lingers o'er the grave,
I would have served thee, as I serve this shield!"
With which, I struck his golden shield a blow,
The where it hung, in state, upon an oak,
That brought it crashing downward, cleft in twain,
And blanched the hue of royal arrogance!
"Henceforth," I cried, "come not within my reach,
Nor ask my aid, nor further tempt my mood!"
Whence, straight, I'm come to Framnäs, as you see!

[*Great excitement among THE WARRIORS. He goes on, quieting it, by a gesture.*]

My comrades, I have shown you all the truth
In this unhappy thing, that you might know
To what you pledge yourselves, in following me.
If there be any moved to serve the King,
I bid him, with all friendship, to be gone!
Are there, among you, any of this mind?

THE WARRIORS [*Together.*]

No! [*Tumult.*]

FRITHIOF [*Quieting them.*]

Good friends! But one word more!—Good Friends!—
I pray!

I am more grieved than I can well make known,
Even to you, who knew my hopes so well,
And see them here dispersed and set at naught,
That hatred should arise where love hath dwelt

THE NORSEMAN

So long a time, and such a peace give place
To such a quarrel! Hardships, labors, wars,—
I never would have murmured or turned back!
But now, indeed, I know not where to turn!
These deep affronts will burn into my blood,
Till vengeful thoughts infest my nights and days!
Had I but ready means——

THE WARRIORS

For Frithiof!

Call on us!

We follow thee!

FRITHIOF [*Above the confusion.*]

Good comrades, hear me speak! Have patience, friends!

FIRST WARRIOR

He counsels patience! Is this Thorsten's son?

SECOND WARRIOR

What! Shall we then be patient of affronts?

FRITHIOF [*Answering him.*]

Aye, rather than of such untempered zeal!

[*To the rest.*]

O, Comrades, Warriors, ye are they who fought,
With Thorsten, on full many a desperate field;
Worn with the fury of the open seas;
Grown grey in Iceland's vigils; in her wars,

THE NORSEMAN

Following the blade that flashed so redly forth,
Above the gloom that veiled the battle-front,
As Uller's lights array their streaming spears
'Gainst the thick darkness of the winter skies !
Ye were my father's sinew and his strength ;
I am his son, and he doth live in me !
Unto the ways of warfare was I born ;
Cradled in courage, schooled to smile on death ;
And here I pledge you, on what day we fight,
Such cheerful leadership, such joy in arms,
That you shall rush to meet the oncoming foe,
Like a great band of lovers to your loves !
Ye are but lately come from Thorsten's grave,
The solemn dirge still echoes in your ears ;
For such a sire, beseech a worthy son !
To gracious Odin let your prayers ascend,
'To guide the arm that wields this spotless blade,
Great Angurvadel, Lightning of the North !

[*Drawing his sword, which illumines the Hall like a lightning-flash.*]

So shall our land secure her memories,
And ye find consolation in your scars !
King Bele was my master and my friend ;
He loved his Kingdom, and his sons full well ;
More than my life, his daughter do I love.
I cannot right, with sudden turbulence,
A wrong that of such friendships doth arise !
Be patient, nothing doubting of my zeal,
Until I can discover some sure plan

THE NORSEMAN

Whereby, once more, to come into my own.
Go feast again! Share, of these ancient halls,
The long-familiar hospitality,
Changed, yet unchanged, and, thinking on the past,
Leave, for a time, the present's need to me!

FIRST WARRIOR [*Going.*]

Why, so we will! Thou sayest valiantly!
By this we know thou art thy father's son!

SECOND WARRIOR

Wisdom with courage! We shall fight for thee!

[THE SKALD and WARRIORS *go out, murmuring approval, among themselves.*]

FRITHIOF [*To BJÖRN, who is going out with the rest.*]

Björn!

BJÖRN [*Coming back.*]

Frithiof, thou call'st me?

FRITHIOF

O, Björn, Björn,
My heart is lead and ice, within my breast!
Come, give me comfort of thy counsel, friend!
I shall go mad with pondering on this thing!
How shall I mend it! For you know my hope
Has ever been that I might come to be
That, unto Iceland, which my father was!
How shall I steal my dove from out the nest?

THE NORSEMAN

How shall I punish Helge's insolence,
Without inflicting on our little Isle,
A graver wrong than has been done to me?
O, think, Björn, how slighted they the past!
Those happy days of our old Master's reign,
That Thorsten's mighty prowess kept secure!

BJÖRN

They ruled like one, great Thorsten and the King!

FRITHIOF

They were like brothers. But King Bele's sons
Would have no cousins of such plain complexion!

BJÖRN

Helge is full of dark hypocrisy
And cunning priestcraft! He it is that stirs
This mischief up, blowing the idle Prince
Like chaff before the wind of his intent!

FRITHIOF

How have I roused this envy in the King?
Thou know'st well I have no love of place,
Nor dream of eminence; that I would hang,
With scarce a sigh, my sword upon the wall,
And dwell with peace in these fair-colored fields,—
Could I transplant my lily to their soil.
Ah, there 's the rankle in the wound, Björn!
Why did they place, my father and the king,
Their two young children, Ingeborg and me,

THE NORSEMAN

Beneath one roof, to grow inseparable?
O, my White Rose, my little Ingeborg,
The spirit of thy youth is in my blood!
The swift and tender valor of thy soul
Is the pure spell that leads me on to bliss!
My life thou art, and he who takes my life,
It shall go hard but he shall lose his own!
Thy smiles, the light I never sought in vain,
That love lit up within thy fearless eyes;
The pressure of those little arms of thine
About my neck, when, in a laughing mood,
I bore thee high across the mountain-brook—
O, father! O, King Bele! Would ye take
The treasure from me, ye so freely gave?
O, would ye break the heart ye woke in me?

[*Drawing his sword, in a frenzy of bitterness.*]

Great Angurvadel, by thy living strength,
Thou art no vassal! Thou, at least, hast drunk
The blood of Kings, and lain in Valund's hand!
Come, Angurvadel, we will take the North—
And found an empire—and hew out a crown!
Come! Thou and I, together—

BJÖRN [*Laying a hand upon his shoulder.*]

Frithiof! Pray!

FRITHIOF [*Recalling himself.*]

Björn! Forgive me! I grow mad, I think,
With all this brooding and perplexity!

THE NORSEMAN

Speak to me, friend, restore me to myself !
I thirst for vengeance, but my heart cries out
That, so, I may prepare my love some hurt !
For wisdom ! So to bear my father's sword
That these sweet valleys and slow-moving herds,
These wooded hill-tops and bright mountain-lakes,
May know no other shadow than is cast
Upon their beauty by the wandering clouds !
I seem to feel, upon my soul, Björn,
The weight of some tumultuous destiny
I must enact, despite my gentler will !
Thou saw'st, but now, how jealously our men
Received the mention of this open wrong,
This public scorn that turns my heart to fire !
How shall I cool it ? Counsel me, Björn !

BJÖRN

Thou know'st, Frithiof, I would give my life
To right thy wrongs, — to serve thee anyway !
I'm a rough soldier, shy of flattering words ;
My loves, for this, lie deeper than my lips ;
And thee, O chosen comrade, have I loved
Since that first morn, when, like unbridled colts,
We ran, together, joyously afield.
Believe me, Frithiof, to see thee sad,
To see thee taunted by a prouder foe
Than I can put to silence with my sword,
Goes to my heart, as strong wine to the head !
Let but dark Helge come within my reach,

THE NORSEMAN

Upon a free-fought field, I'll carve for thee
So bright a vengeance on the prostrate King
As shall win notice of the bloodiest ground!
Enough of this! Listen, O Frithiof,
To such plain counsel as I have to give,—
'Tis taught me by my diligence for thee!

FRITHIOF

Good friend, I know thy love! Speak on, Speak on!

BJÖRN [*Beckoning FRITHIOF to the door.*]

See yonder captive sea-bird, where she rides
The leaping waves that touch her sturdy bow,
And race along her shining length of keel!

FRITHIOF [*Looking seaward.*]

Ellida, thou best ship in all the North!

BJÖRN

Loose those black pinions, swifter than the breeze;
Without delay for Sognefylke sail,—
To-night, the wind and tide will favor thee,—
See for thyself, the Princess Ingeborg,
Recount thy wrongs, and let *her* counsel thee.

FRITHIOF

O, best of guides! My pulses leap with joy
At thought of it! But Helge keeps her close

THE NORSEMAN

Within the temple! It is held a crime
For any man to speak to any maid,
Within the shrine of Balder.

BJÖRN

There 's the grove!
By Krake, Ing'borg's maiden, I could send
A message, bidding her to meet thee there.

FRITHIOF

And is this maiden to be trusted, so?

BJÖRN

I 'd stake my life upon it!

FRITHIOF [*Smiling.*]

What, Björn!
Thou, too, old soldier, cased in triple-mail,
Has Freya found a maid to vanquish thee?

BJÖRN

And if I love, my love must wait on thine!
I 've sworn to share thy fortunes, Frithiof;
As thou dost fare, so Björn will fare with thee!

FRITHIOF [*Moved.*]

O brother, how may I deserve thy love! —
To-night, we 'll leave our fears upon the shore!

THE NORSEMAN

Would night were come! "Inaction" is a word
To shake the firmest hero of us all!
Come, let's go bid the seamen to prepare
The ship for sailing!

BJÖRN

Why, with all my heart!

[*They go toward the door. BJÖRN, who is in advance, halts upon the threshold.*]

Frithiof, what's this, two strangers, as I see
Are coming hither, through the birchen-wood!

FRITHIOF

Wait! Let us get a prior look at them!

[*FRITHIOF and BJÖRN look, cautiously, around the door. HILDING and BLAETAND are seen climbing the forest-path. HILDING is old and feeble, and leans for support upon his companion.*]

From Sognefylke! Hilding, by my faith!
What can this mean, Björn? We must be wise—
And wary! Bring the board! A game of chess
Will serve to give our moves serenity!

[*They hastily set a chess-board, seat themselves, and appear to be absorbed in the game. HILDING and BLAETAND enter.*]

HILDING

Greeting, O Frithiof!

THE NORSEMAN

[FRITHIOF *pays no heed. He is disconcerted, but continues, suavely.*]

I am come in haste,
From Sognefylke, with important news.

FRITHIOF [*Without looking up.*]

Say'st thou? Can aught from Sognefylke bear
Such import?

[*As HILDING hesitates, in dismay.*]

Well, say on! Unfold thy news!

HILDING [*Concealing his annoyance.*]

King Ring, of Ringric, doth invade our coast;
Hourly the danger grows more imminent;
And I am sent, O Frithiof, unto thee,
To ask that thou wilt bring thy matchless ship,
The far-renowned Ellida, with thy men,
And aid us to repulse this enemy,
Who, though an aged, is a mighty man.

FRITHIOF [*To BJÖRN; as if intent upon the game.*]

Björn, thy King's imperiled. Take this pawn,
And scruple not!

HILDING [*Angrily.*]

Thy bearing is too bold!
Is it thy purpose to affront the King?

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF [*Looking at him, for the first time.*]

It is my purpose and my fondest wish.

HILDING [*With a change of method.*]

The Princess serves in Balder's holy shrine ;
When told of Iceland's great necessity,
And peril of approaching war, she said
The people's hopes would all be fixed on thee.

FRITHIOF [*To BJÖRN.*]

My Queen, Björn ! Would'st thou involve my Queen ?
Come, now I throw myself into the game,
And shall prove crafty in defense of her !

HILDING [*Thoroughly angered.*]

I am too old to bear with mockery !
Shall not my claim to thine affection gain
Respect, at least ? Some answer to my suit ?
What, no reply ? — Then, Frithiof, fare thee well !

FRITHIOF [*Rising, and taking HILDING by both hands.*]

Father, my answer to King Bele's sons
I have already made. My disrespect
Was for thine enterprise, and not for thee.

[*He leads HILDING to a seat ; they talk, aside.*]

BJÖRN [*Approaching BLAETAND.*]

Art thou not Sigurd's son ? And used we not
To sport, together, in bright Aegir's wave ?

THE NORSEMAN

BLAETAND

I did not think thou would'st remember me !

BJÖRN

I do recall thee well. A saucy boy !

BLAETAND [*Smiling.*]

Thou wert a bold one ! There were few, indeed,
Who dared to bait the little Framnäs bear !

BJÖRN

Wert thou a friend to Thorsten ?

BLAETAND

Who was not ?

BJÖRN

Then thou dost bear his son no hostile will ?

BLAETAND

Nay, I have heard but good of Frithiof.

BJÖRN

For old times' sake, wilt thou the bearer be
Of a brief message from the Framnäs bear,
To a white swan, in Sogne ?

THE NORSEMAN

BLAETAND [*Smiling.*]

That I will! —
If I can find the lovely creature out!

BJÖRN

'T is Krake, Ing'borg's maiden. Know'st thou her?

BLAETAND [*Surprised.*]

I know her well!

BJÖRN

Then I will write a word.
[*He goes out.*]

HILDING [*To FRITHIOF.*]

Reflect, O son! Is there no wiser way?

FRITHIOF

Father, there seems no other way, at all.

HILDING [*Sorrowfully.*]

So fair a bud to know this early blight!
Four lovely children, playing 'round my door,—
I see ye, still! Helge, a silent boy,
And Halfdan, shy and slender as a fawn,
Thou, in thine azure mantle, a full head
'Taller than either,—and more kinglike, too!

THE NORSEMAN

But, ah, the fairest flower of you all
Was Ing'borg! Little Ing'borg! Such a child!
A rose, a lily! Who could paint her face,
As then it bloomed upon the sunlit world,
A-dance upon its little, snowy stem!

FRITHIOF

Enough, good father! Do not wring my heart
With the remembrance. 'T was too sweet a dream
To outlast childhood!

[*Including* BLAETAND.]

Will you rest yourselves,
Take some refreshment, here, before you go?

HILDING

Nay, son! Our galley waits upon the shore.
Rouse not thine household, for we must be gone
As quickly as we came.

FRITHIOF

Your blessing, then,
O father, for who knows when we shall meet
Again, in this all-transitory world.

[*He kneels.*]

HILDING [*Laying his hands on FRITHIOF's head.*]

Odin protect thee, my beloved son;
Our Father guide thee to His lasting good.

THE NORSEMAN

[*He raises FRITHIOF, and they go out, together, slowly, by the same door through which HILDING and BLAETAND came, as BJÖRN re-enters.*]

BJÖRN [*To BLAETAND.*]

Here is the letter! You'll deliver it?

BLAETAND

As sure as I set foot upon the shore!

[*They go out, together, in conversation. From the doorway, FRITHIOF and BJÖRN watch HILDING and BLAETAND depart.*]

FRITHIOF and BJÖRN [*Re-entering.*]

Farewell, good Hilding!

Blaetand, fare thee well!

FRITHIOF

Now, with what heart shall we set out, Björn!
O all ye tides, and all ye favoring gales,
Advance my hopes, and fill my eager sails!

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

ACT II

SCENE I. *At Sognefylke. The holy grove of Balder. In the background, the temple. Before it, in a little clearing, a great oak, with gnarled trunk and spreading branches. The clearing is surrounded by thick underwoods. It is night. HELGE and THE HIGH PRIEST enter.*

HELGE [*In a low voice.*]

How came you by this news?

THE HIGH PRIEST

Why, 't was by chance !
Some of our younger brothers went to bathe,
At daylight, in the sea. Returning home,
They passed before the temple, and beheld
Blaetand, the son of Sigurd, in close talk
With Krake, as she spread the Princess' robes
To bleach upon the grass ; and saw her take
A letter from his hand. Thereafter, came
The Princess unto me, and begged to keep
The altar-vigil quite alone, to-night,
Save for her maiden. Viewing all these things
With great suspicion, I have sent to thee
Thrice, before now, but found thee not at court.

THE NORSEMAN

HELGE

Thou hast done well! 'Tis most significant!
This Blaetand went with Hilding, yesterday,
To Frithiof's house. If I could trap them, here!—
Hast thou, say, half a score of stalwart men
Who will, to-night, keep watch upon this wood?

THE HIGH PRIEST

Yes, Sire! Such as proudly will obey
Thy royal bidding!

HELGE

Then assemble them
With all despatch! The night wears on apace!

THE HIGH PRIEST

Sire, at once! I pray thee, come this way!

[HELGE *and* THE HIGH PRIEST *go out. Enter*
FRITHIOF *and* BJÖRN, *cautiously.*]

FRITHIOF

This is the hour when they should meet us here!
How still the grove and darkened temple lie!
Thou dost not think that Blaetand could have failed?—

BJÖRN [*Interrupting him.*]

Nay, look! Is that a light within the shrine?

[*A faint light appears within the temple.*]

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF

We 'll hide ourselves ! Some priest may be astir !

[*They conceal themselves. KRAKE comes, cautiously, out of the temple.*]

KRAKE [*In a whisper.*]

Björn ?

[*BJÖRN and FRITHIOF show themselves.*]

BJÖRN

Krake, we 're here ! Is all the world asleep ?

KRAKE

As sound as Rinda ! [*To BJÖRN.*] Blaetand brought thy word

At morning, and the Princess made request
That she and I might tend the altar-fire,
To-night, together, offering special prayer
For Iceland's safe deliverance from her foe.

[*They smile. To FRITHIOF.*]

Sir, I will go and bring the Princess hither !

FRITHIOF

Do so, with every caution and despatch !
Thou art a faithful maiden !

[*KRAKE goes into the temple and returns with INGE-BORG, who hastens to FRITHIOF.*]

THE NORSEMAN

INGEBORG [*Holding FRITHIOF by the hand; to BJÖRN.*]

Good Björn,
Art thou a friend to us in this, as ever?

BJÖRN

Madam, till death and after!

INGEBORG

Staunchly said!
Do thou and Krake watch without the wood!

BJÖRN

We go, at once! [*To FRITHIOF.*] If any come this way
Krake will warn thee.

FRITHIOF

Good! Be vigilant!
[*BJÖRN and KRAKE go out.*]

INGEBORG

O Best Beloved, art thou come at last?

FRITHIOF [*Taking her in his arms.*]
Think what "at last" to thee, must seem to me!

INGEBORG [*Smiling tenderly.*]

Vain Heart, dost thou lay claim to loving most?

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF

I have loved longer ! Thou can'st not deny
I dreamed of thee, ere thou did'st dream of me !

INGEBORG

Ah, Love, but I did dream myself awake,
Hearing thy voice, that called me, in my sleep !

FRITHIOF

So love is born, the hour that gave him birth
Shall not concern us ! O, my Life and Breath,
So we are one, what matters all the rest ?

*[After a moment ; leading her to a seat among the roots
of the oak-tree, on the side concealed from the temple.]*

Sit here, my Princess, on this lowly throne,
And listen to thy least of worshippers,
Who has a weight of words upon his heart,
That must be uttered in a winged hour !

INGEBORG

O Sweet, say on ! For time runs furiously
Away, when thou and I but look on him !

FRITHIOF

Hast thou heard aught of how thy brothers met
The offer of my aid, and scorned my suit
For thy dear hand ?

THE NORSEMAN

INGEBORG

Oh, I have heard! And, Love,
My heart so burned to 'venge thy treacherous hurt,
That half I feared it would consume itself!
I would have sent to thee, but have no friend,
Save Krake, I would dare to trust so far.

FRITHIOF

O thou most blessed, generous champion!
Ingeborg, I fear no fate in all the world,
Save that some fate may part us! I have had,
Of late, a cruel vision, in my sleep,
Of being sundered from thee, hopelessly,
By some rude trick of baleful destiny,
And, from my separate exile, I have waked
With tear-blind eyes, and clenched, despoiled hands!

INGEBORG [*In alarm, soothing him.*]

Nay, dearest, speak not so! The gods may hear!
Yet 't is not strange that, 'twixt these stressful days,
You should have dreamed so, for your daytime thoughts
Were filled with pondering on our unfixed fate,
And sleep, that drugs the will, did but unleash
The fears your waking self was master of.

FRITHIOF

O little hand, O little, starry hand,
To bear such certain soothing in a touch!

THE NORSEMAN

Yet for this very purpose am I come,—
That this small hand may put great fears to rest !
Bravest and truest, wilt thou come away,
Before the sun shall wake this fitful world
To one more day of our uncertainty ?
Our good ship frets at anchor, in the bay ;
The tide 's at flood, and she will bear us far
From all pursuers, to bright, southern shores,
Where I shall found a kingdom, for my Queen,
More rich and rare than any Northern throne,
We are beset by desperate circumstance,
Grave war impends, and threatens our escape ;
To halt in our design, may mean to lose
All that makes man and woman godlike, free,—
Yea, all life's hope of best and tenderest.
Dear, thou wilt come ? Thou wilt adventure so,
With one whose life doth hang upon thy love ?

INGEBORG

To-day and now, Beloved of my Soul !

FRITHIOF

Seems, then, "to-day" a day too soon for love ?

INGEBORG

Nay, dear my lord, to love's impatient sense,
Seconds seem ages that delay our bliss !
Yet, — were we leaving any way untried
That seems less headlong ! Frithiof, thinkest thou
My brothers' wills might ever softened be ?

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF

Never to give consent to *thee and me.*

INGEBORG [*Rising.*]

Then come, bright day, and smile upon a love
Too strong for fate to sunder or compel! [*To FRITHIOF.*]
Through all the world, beyond the farthest sea,
Whither thou goest, I will go with thee!

FRITHIOF [*Embracing her, rapturously.*]

Now am I made of all Earth's sons most blest!

[*Taking from his arm a ring of massive and antique pattern, surmounted by a cluster of rubies.*]

Dear Bride, Pure Soul, put on this golden ring.
Long has it been an heirloom in my race;
'T is said that Valund forged and fashioned it;
Heroes have worn it, magic is its power.
'T will serve as pledge and symbol of our love.—
The shining circle of our minds and souls,
Lit with the fiery jewels of our blood!

[*He places the ring on her arm.*]

INGEBORG

When I part from it may my frame be cold,
And blind my vision to this mortal scene!

[*The first, faint light begins to appear in the East. A bird twitters.*]

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF [*Startled.*]

Day dawns! Make haste, O Sunlight of my Soul!
Thy faithful Krake 'll go with thee!

INGEBORG [*Smiling.*]

It is most certain, — for she loves Björn!

FRITHIOF

Scarce more than thee, I'd swear! I'll fetch them both.
Hast thou a heavy mantle? It is cold
Within the galley, on the morning sea.

INGEBORG [*Going.*]

I'll get a few necessities together.

FRITHIOF

Dearest, make haste! The light grows all too fast!

INGEBORG

I shall be ready when you come again!

[*She goes into the temple. FRITHIOF runs off in the direction BJÖRN and KRAKE have taken. A company of THE PRIESTS of Balder, led by HELGE and THE HIGH PRIEST, silently enter, and surround the clearing.*]

THE HIGH PRIEST [*To HELGE.*]

Sire, they are returning, hide thyself!

THE NORSEMAN

HELGE [*To THE PRIESTS.*]

Remember to disarm them suddenly!

[*All conceal themselves in ambush.* FRITHIOF, BJÖRN,
and KRAKE *re-enter.*]

KRAKE [*Anxiously.*]

Did you not hear a sound within the wood?

BJÖRN [*Re-assuringly.*]

Why, waking woods are full of rustling sound!

KRAKE

Nay, this was different! It grows too light!
Conceal yourselves within the temple-gate,
While I go fetch my mistress! Come this way!

BJÖRN

'T is sacrilege for us to enter there!

FRITHIOF

We 'll take thy maid's good counsel! Come, Björn!
Great Balder is the god of human joy,
And pure loves will not offend his shrine.

[FRITHIOF, BJÖRN, and KRAKE, *enter the temple.* THE
PRIESTS *draw closer, in waiting.* It grows lighter.]

THE NORSEMAN

THE HIGH PRIEST [*In a low voice.*]

Be ready, now! The King will give the sign!

[FRITHIOF and INGEBORG, BJÖRN and KRAKE re-enter, ready for flight; the women are closely veiled, and wrapped in dark mantles.]

INGEBORG [*Turning, for a last look at the temple.*]

Farewell, Bright Balder, may thy blessing fall
On us, thy homeless children, faring forth
To love's divine adventure!

[*They all turn, reverently, toward the temple. As they do so, HELGE steps out, behind them, giving the signal to THE PRIESTS. They throw themselves upon FRITHIOF and BJÖRN, who struggle fiercely, but are overcome by numbers, and the suddenness of the attack, and bound, before they can draw their swords. As THE PRIESTS form a circle around their prisoners, and the two women, who cling to them, panic-stricken, the sun rises in full splendour, and the birds begin to sing, in the forest.*]

HELGE [*To FRITHIOF, tauntingly.*]

How now, young braggart, thou who would'st defend
Our Kingdom with the might of thy strong arm?
Had'st thou not wit enough to steal a maid
From these unwarlike zealots, holy men,
Whose lives are spent in quietude and prayer?

THE NORSEMAN

A poor accounting for a hero! Come!
Could'st thou not keep thy booty with that sword
Which, in thy *speech*, was so invincible?

FRITHIOF

This hour is thine, O Helge! It may be,
An hour will dawn when I shall answer thee! [*Furiously.*]
Loose but these bonds, and I will drive thy crew
Of hangdog priests, before thee, to the sea,
To drown like rats! Yea, with this single sword!

[*In a frenzy of helpless anger.*]

Thou dar'st not, Helge! Dar'st not set me free!

HELGE

Peace, ruffian! [*To INGEBORG, grimly.*]
Now, fair sister, come with me!

[*He pulls her away from FRITHIOF, and THE PRIESTS
close in around the prisoners, as the curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

SCENE 2. *The sea-coast near Sognefylke; a stormy sunset, at the end of the same day. A twelve-oared galley is drawn up on the beach. The Ellida is not seen.*

HELGE and HALFDAN enter. HALFDAN, a slender youth, carries a falcon on his wrist.

HALFDAN [*Petulantly.*]

I'll have no words with these malignant hags!

HELGE

I will instruct them. Be more satisfied!
Statescraft does not absorb thee overmuch!
I would thy sports were sterner!

HALFDAN [*Impatiently.*]

Dost thou so?
And I that thine were less mischievous! Come!
I do not like this mixture of thy brew,—
Witchcraft, and spying priests in ambuscade!
Frithiof was e'er an honest lad, enow,
Why not pronounce him banished, honestly?

HELGE [*Sternly.*]

And loose the foremost foeman in the North
Against our Kingdom? Folly sits most plain
In lofty places! Why, thou silly boy,
Iceland would be in arms for Frithiof,

THE NORSEMAN

Ere Halfdan could exchange his hunting-spear
For stouter weapons! Thorsten was the source
Of Iceland's valor; Frithiof bears his bow;
Ere he can bend it, we must vanquish him!

HALFDAN

He would have cast his vantage in thy scale.

HELGE

And robbed me, after, of pre-eminence!
Of such pretensions will I strip him bare,
And cast him forth like scum upon the tide!

HALFDAN

I would not be my brother's enemy!

HELGE [*With meaning.*]

See to it, then, that thou remain'st his friend!
Keep to thy falcon-flying! I will steer
Our ship of state among these transient shoals.

HALFDAN

'T would take small wit to presage for the barque
A tortuous passage!

HELGE

Peace! Who comes this way?

THE NORSEMAN

HALFDAN [*Reconnoitering.*]

Methinks they are the beauteous maids with whom
We have an assignation. Now, Sir King!

[*He throws himself on the shingle, and gives his attention to teasing the falcon. HELGE turns away, with an angry gesture, to meet HAM and HEID, who enter. HAM is gaunt and tall, with streaming hair and fluttering rags. HEID is squat, and hoary with age, gnarled and bent into grotesque postures.*]

HELGE

How now, good dames? Are you inclined to serve
Your King, discreetly, with your magic arts?

HAM

Sire, an we may.

HEID

An it should be a case
Wherein our arts *may* serve thee.

HELGE

Such it is.
You know how Frithiof, Thorsten's lawless son,
Was found, at morn, in Balder's holy grove,
Wooing the Princess at the very shrine.

THE NORSEMAN

He has been sentenced, for this sacrilege,
To sail, to-night, bound for the Faroë Isles,
There to collect a tribute, from their Earl,
That formerly was paid to Iceland's King.

[*Pointing off stage.*]

His ship lies in the offing, rigged to sail!

THE WITCHES

Ho, Ho! A wily King!

A crafty Prince!

[*They distort themselves with laughter.*]

HALFDAN [*From his couch, on the sand; with
feigned humility.*]

Nay, worthy charmers! Softly, by your leaves!
It was our brother's plan! I would not seem
To deck myself in borrowed artifice.

HELGE [*Sternly.*]

Peace, trifler! [*To THE WITCHES.*] Prithee, save your
merriment

For some more sportive and more fit occasion.

HAM [*Fawning.*]

Sire, if we were merry, 't was to think
How soundly thou had'st dealt with this young knave.

THE NORSEMAN

HEID [*Chuckling.*]

To take, with twenty men, from the proud Yarl,
Angantyr, tribute which has not been paid
Since antique times ! There 'll not be left so much
As hide or hair of any of his crew !

HELGE [*Darkly.*]

Of that I would make surer ! Frithiof bears
A magic sword, and steers a charmed ship !
Warfare is full of fortunes and escapes
Miraculous, attended by the gods !

[*To* HEID ; *fiercely.*]

Hast thou a spell to raise the ocean-bed,
And bid it sink again, sucking all things
Less than itself into a maelstrom dark
Of sure annihilation ?

HEID [*Gloating.*]

Such a storm,
My arts can summon up !

HELGE [*To* HAM.]

Can'st thou array
All the relentless forces of the air
Against the strength of man, till ships are strewn
Upon the hungry waters, horribly ?

THE NORSEMAN

HAM [*Exulting.*]

Such havoc can I loose upon the void !

HELGE [*Dropping his voice.*]

Frithiof, but now, has promised to set sail
At sundown, be the weather foul or fair ;
Call up a storm that shall make sure his death,
And I 'll reward your cunning, liberally.

THE WITCHES [*Greedily.*]

What shall we have ?

What shall our payment be ?

HELGE

Gold, gold, and gold again, and yet more gold !
[*Aside.*]

Hate makes a spendthrift of a frugal man !

THE WITCHES

Sire, 't is done !

We 'll do thy royal will !

HALFDAN [*Rising with a shudder.*]

I have no mind or temper for such means
To dire ends ! The gods be merciful !

THE NORSEMAN

[HELGE and HALFDAN stand aside. THE WITCHES, after a glance at the sky, grimace at each other, and draw two circles in the sand, within which they carve runes, with their staffs. They begin a weird dance. It grows darker.]

HAM [*Chanting.*]

Gust, and squall, and biting gale
Fret and tear the Norseman's sail;
Tempest fierce and hurricane,
Dive into the pallid main,
And with dreadful pinions sweep
Billows high as hell is deep;
Powers of death, bestride the wave,
To his dim, unfathomed grave
Draw the luckless seaman down,
Like a trap-held rat to drown.

[*Threatening masses of cloud begin to drive across the sky.*]

[HEID *Chanting.*]

Gloom and horrid darkness spread
O'er the Norseman's fated head;
Numbing cold and stinging hail
Freeze his blood and tear his sail;
Ashen mists obscure his way;
Thunder roll and lightning play;
Demons fright his desperate crew

THE NORSEMAN

With phantom shapes and terrors new ;
Cast his barque, with fatal shock
On the sharp and rending rock,
Whelmed and done, to fill and sink,
O'er the whirlpool's yawning brink.

[*The sea rises. Lightning and distant thunder. HALFDAN buries his face in his cloak.*]

HELGE

How now, thou craven Prince? Hold up thy head!
'T is not *thy* knell these ghostly sibyls sound!
Here comes the Court! Now, show thyself a man!

[HALFDAN *recovers himself*. THE WITCHES *go out*. FRITHIOF, BJÖRN, and MARINERS, *led by* THE PRIESTS *of Balder, enter, followed by* HUNVOR, INGEBORG, KRAKE, HILDING, BLAETAND, and COURTIERS. FRITHIOF and BJÖRN *are still bound*. *The sun sets, as the procession approaches, and the storm begins to increase in violence. HALFDAN gives the falcon to a page.*]

THE HIGH PRIEST

Sire, the prisoner has agreed to pay
The penalty thy mercy doth impose.

HELGE [*To* FRITHIOF.]

Wilt thou embark, at once, upon this quest,
Pledging thine oath that thou wilt not return
To Iceland, till this tribute is secured?

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF

Shall I be freely pardoned, if I do
Succeed in this?

HELGE

All will be pardoned thee.

FRITHIOF

Loose, then, these bonds, and we'll essay the task!

[THE PRIESTS *release* FRITHIOF and BJÖRN.]

FIRST MARINER [*To* FRITHIOF; *aside.*]

We shall take death aboard, if we embark
In such a gale!

SECOND MARINER [*Aside.*]

Good master, be advised!

FRITHIOF [*To* THE MARINERS.]

My word is pledged. Our Warriors are on board.
If ye fear death, withdraw from this emprise,
If not, go launch the galley with all speed.

[THE MARINERS *go down to the shore, and prepare to launch the galley. The storm increases in fury.*]

THE NORSEMAN

INGEBORG [*Throwing herself, suddenly, on her knees, before HELGE.*]

Brother, a little mercy! In this sky?
Delay them till to-morrow! Be implored!
Sweet brother, till to-morrow! I'll engage
My life upon their going!

HELGE [*Dragging her, roughly, to her feet.*]

Wayward girl!

Thou frail betrayer of thy sacred trust,
And queenly office, get thee from my sight!
Lest I withdraw, in looking on thy shame,
The mercy I have shown!

[*He pushes her from him. She is received into the arms of KRAKE. FRITHIOF is restrained, by BJÖRN, from drawing his sword against HELGE. To FRITHIOF.*]

And now, begone,
Thou ravisher of shrines! Thou plotter thou!
Thou foul blasphemer of the most high gods!

FRITHIOF [*Proudly.*]

I have blasphemed no god, nor wronged no shrine.

HELGE

Why, now, thou lay'st a lie upon thy sin!
We took thee in the very temple-gate!

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF

Temples are man-made stuff ! The gods do dwell
In honest hearts, in fields, and tranquil air ;
Where'er good actions are, the gods are there !

[*To* INGEBORG.]

Farewell, dear love, dear life, dear bride, dear friend !
Nay, grieve not so ! I shall behold again
Thy face illumed with joy ! Faith tells me so !

[*To* HILDING, *putting* INGEBORG *into his arms.*]

Father, thy child ! Good Krake, fare thee well !

[*He runs down to the shore, and leaps into the galley.*]

BJÖRN [*To* KRAKE.]

Sweet girl, keep faith ! Think on thy rough Björn !

KRAKE

As I do live, I 'll never love but thee !

[BJÖRN *follows* FRITHIOF. *The galley is launched, through the surf, with great difficulty. KRAKE waves them a farewell, and tries to encourage INGEBORG, who is weeping, bitterly, in HILDING'S arms. As the boat disappears, the company follow, to the water's edge. The storm reaches its height.*]

HALFDAN

How do they live, at all, in such a sea ?

THE NORSEMAN

HUNVOR

They will not reach the ship!

[*A blinding and terrible thunder-bolt.*]

Great Thor defend!

A CONFUSION OF VOICES

The boat is gone!

The ship is swallowed up!

They 're lost!

God's mercy on them!

Woeful fate!

[*A blinding mist settles down over the sea. The storm begins to subside.*]

INGEBORG [*Confronting* HELGE.]

Now curses be upon thee and thy house!

Be thou undone, as thou hast dealt with me!

Make me *thy* bride, O Aegir!

[*She attempts to throw herself into the sea, but is deterred by HILDING and HALFDAN, who lay her down, in a swoon, at the feet of HELGE.*]

HELGE [*Lifting INGEORG'S arm, which has become bared, in the struggle.*]

Hunvor, see!

What ring is this? Yon dead man's lover's pledge?

Here, keep it safe!

THE NORSEMAN

[*He takes the ring from INGEBOG'S arm, and gives it to HUNVOR. To HALFDAN and HILDING.*]

Come, bear the maid away !

[*HALFDAN and HILDING bear out the insensible body of INGEBOG, followed by KRAKE, weeping, and THE PRIESTS and COURTIER.*]

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

ACT III

SCENE I. *A road near Sognefylke. Midsummer. Enter a procession of THE PRIESTS of Balder, in festal robes, and carrying garlands, on their way to the grove of Balder, to hold the midsummer feast. They are led by THE HIGH PRIEST and HELGE.*

THE HIGH PRIEST [*Halting the procession.*]

Here, are the woods well grown with underbrush !
Disperse, I pray, and gather what you can
To feed great Balder's bale-fire, for its flame
Must leap as high as the midsummer heaven,
To show His glory, and declare His praise !

[THE PRIESTS *scatter, obediently, through the woods, to cut fagots.* HELGE and THE HIGH PRIEST *talk, aside.*]

HELGE

What was this sail thou did'st report to me,
Having been sighted by some fishermen,
Without the bay, at sunrise ?

THE HIGH PRIEST

Why, 't was said
To be a dragon-ship of monstrous size,
Veiled in the mists of morning, phantom-wise.

THE NORSEMAN

But, Sire, thou knowest that our simple folk
Are filled with superstition, and do set
A demon-shape astride of every whale !
I doubt me not that 't was some merchant-ship,
That loomed mysterious, in the dawning light,
Above their little prows, a-frighting them !

HELGE [*In a low voice.*]

Answer me truly. Saw'st thou Frithiof's ship
Go down at sea ?

THE HIGH PRIEST

Why, so it seemed to do !
The mist so thickly walled it all about,
I saw it in the lightning's sudden glare,
And then I saw it not ! The people cried
The ship was lost ! Sire,—what thinkest *thou* ?

HELGE [*Grimly.*]

I think that it was lost,—and must remain
Within the deepest hollows of the sea !
Less do I dread that Frithiof's ghost should walk,
Than that this brawling fellow should return,
'To find his mistress wedded to King Ring,
And that our flames had eaten up his house !
For then would he bring down upon our realm
Such dire retaliation and revolt,

THE NORSEMAN

As, weakened by this ill-starred war with Ring,
Our royal forces scarce could cope withal.

THE HIGH PRIEST

King Ring is now thine ally, and would send
Thee aid, in such a threatening circumstance !

HELGE

I cannot trust our sister to fulfil
A wifely part that will content him, long !
That maiden hath a strong, continuous will
Toward what she loves. From childhood was it so !
And I do sometimes wake and sweat, at night,
Thinking I hear the trumpets of King Ring
Announce, in her, some contumacious act,
Or sudden rashness, that shall end our truce !

THE HIGH PRIEST

Nay, Sire, think not so ! Take heart, I pray !
We 'll raise a chant, and be upon our way !
He who doth serve the gods, the gods serve well,
And shall cast down his enemies to hell.

HELGE

Thy wise and holy council I 'll obey.

[*To himself.*]

Yet I do feel a cloud upon this day !

THE NORSEMAN

THE HIGH PRIEST [*Calling to THE PRIESTS; who return, laden with fagots.*]

Brothers! Good brothers! We'll upon our way!

[*As they re-form, in a procession.*]

Come, raise a chant to Him whom we adore!

THE PRIESTS [*Chanting.*]

*Brightness of the risen sun,
Thee we worship, Thee we praise,
Glory of the day that's done,
Songs to Thee we'll raise!*

*Master, Maker, Warmth, and Joy,
Giver of all Life, we pray,
Weave Thy garland, and Thy crown,
Of our souls, this day!*

[*They go out, chanting. HILDING and BLAETAND enter.*
HILDING has aged, visibly. He holds FRITHIOF'S
dog, Bran, a deerhound, in leash.]

HILDING

I knew his sail when yet it was far off,
No man those sombre pinions might mistake!
But, first, I thought it was a phantom ship,
A spectral craft, manned by a ghostly crew,
Whose helmsman was arisen from the dead,
To wreak some frightful vengeance on the King!

THE NORSEMAN

You say 't is Frithiof? Frithiof, in the flesh?
My little lad come back? Speak certainly!

BLAETAND

'T is Frithiof in the flesh! I saw his crew
Debark, and watched them, from a vantage point,
As thou did'st bid me. Not a man is lost,
And all seem most exultant in their mood.
Björn and Frithiof like two schoolboys played,
Their men-at-arms seemed no less jubilant.
I tarried till I saw them take the road,
And then I crossed before them, through the wood,
To warn thee they 'll be here immediately.

HILDING

Some miracle befell them! We shall hear!
O Frithiof, O my dear-beloved son,
Death had been kinder than this coming home!
How can I put an end to all thy hopes?
The Norns are cruel, I have lived too long!

BLAETAND

Courage, good Hilding! E'en the bitterest woe
Is softened by the voice of one we love.
Frithiof, indeed, were friendless, wanting thee!
Let us be thankful that the townsfolk flock
Toward the groves, and so desert the shore,
And give us time to fix upon some plan
For Frithiof's safety.

THE NORSEMAN

HILDING [*Tremulously.*]

Thou 'rt a kindly lad !

[*Song, laughter, men's voices, and the tramping of feet are heard, without. The dog strains wildly on his leash, breaks from HILDING, and bounds off, to meet his master.*]

BLAETAND

Good Bran, I slandered thee ! Thou art a friend
Whom Frithiof will find faithful to the end !

[FRITHIOF, *with the dog leaping around him*, BJÖRN,
WARRIORS, and MARINERS, *enter, in high spirits.*]

FRITHIOF [*Catching sight of HILDING and BLAETAND.*]

Father ! What joy is this ! To meet thee so,
'The first of all !

[*Embracing him ; BLAETAND greets BJÖRN.*]

Nay, Bran was first of all !

[*Caressing the dog.*]

Good Bran ! [*To HILDING.*] How comes he here, so far
from all

The household gods he guards so jealously ?—

[*As HILDING does not answer.*]

Father, I came on thee too suddenly,
And have alarmed thee, like a heedless boy !

THE NORSEMAN

BLAETAND

We thought thee shipwrecked, — lost, with all thy crew.

FRITHIOF

Why, that is strange ! Who brought such doleful news ?

BLAETAND

We watched you, from the shore, the night you sailed,
In the great storm ; your boat was swallowed up,
After a blinding bolt ; your ship went down,
Or so it seemed, whelmed by a dreadful wave.
You have been mourned as dead, among us all.

FRITHIOF

What tale is this ? Our galley reached the ship
In safety ; then a heavy mist shut down
And hid the coast from view ; the storm grew less,
And we got safe to sea, and met no more
Adventures till we reached the Faroë Isles.

[*To HILDING ; joyfully.*]

Hear, father, how our further fortunes ran !
They will revive thee with their excellence !

[*To HILDING and BLAETAND.*]

When we did touch upon Angantyr's Isle,
And came on shore, down-rushing to the strand,
The Viking Atle, with twelve armed men,
To learn our business and condition, came.

THE NORSEMAN

I gave my errand, measuring his men,
For, swift, a plan of action smote my mind !
He, like a maddened Berserk heard me out,
Then cried " 'T is said that Frithiof never prays
For quarter ! Draw thy spell-protected blade,
And, by the gods, prepare to ask it, now !"
I answered him, " If, with my comrades twelve,
I can outfight and conquer thine and thee,
Wilt thou, with me, to Yarl Angantyr go,
And plead my mission ? " Boastful, he replied,
" That will I ! And do still allow thee choice
Of combat or of flight ! " I laughed aloud !
Then clashing weapons showered fast a hail
Of mighty strokes around us, and the glee
Of battle in our veins ran rapturously !
Oh, these brave comrades, fast and firm they stood,
Each vying to be foremost ! Till, at length,
Keen Angurvadel bit the Viking's blade,
And down I bore him to the earth, and cried,
Kneeling upon his heaving breast, " Who prays
For quarter now ? " And raised my sword on high,
As if to strike, but Atle trembled not,
As he replied " Not I, O Frithiof !
To-morrow, I shall see thee, 'mid the joys
That, in Valhalla, I shall taste, to-day ! "
I raised him up, and, reconciled, we came
Before Angantyr, where I told my tale
Without concealment, laying bare the whole
Of Helge's malice and foul treachery,

THE NORSEMAN

And spoke of my dear Lady. Then the Yarl
Poured out a cup, and said "Full welcome be
To these our halls, in friendship's honoured name!
Since many a creaming horn, with Thorsten, we
Have emptied here, his son shall be denied
No boon that, by our hand, may be supplied."
Wherewith, he called his daughter, and she went
Forth from the hall, in haste, and soon returned,
Bearing this silken purse, with ruby clasp,
And golden tassels,—

[*Holding the purse before them.*]

which her father filled,
Quite to the brim, with gold from foreign lands,

[*Fingling it, boyishly.*]

And gave to me, and said "O welcome guest,
I pay no tribute for my race is free;
Let Bele's sons come take it with their swords,
If they demand it! Thorsten I held dear;
Take, in his name, this gift, as thou wilt
Do with it." Whereupon he made us free
Of his great house, and entertained us all,
Full royally, till we embarked again,
And safely voyaged homeward with light hearts.—

[*Pausing; then, astonished, as HILDING does not speak.*]

Father, no word of praise, no smile of joy
For these good fortunes?—[*Alarmed.*] Hast thou some
dark news,
That doth extinguish so, and overspread
Our bright adventures? Let me know the whole!

THE NORSEMAN

HILDING [*With a great effort.*]

Frithiof — the dog — thou did'st exclaim to see
Him here, so far from Framnäs and his home.
He has no home. I found him mournfully
Howling about the ashes of thy house,
The sole remaining tenant of those halls
We loved so well — O son, I can no more!

[*He covers his face with his hands. A furious outcry
from THE WARRIORS.*]

FRITHIOF [*Half-stupified.*]

My house in ashes! [*To BLAETAND.*] Who has done this
thing?

BLAETAND

'T was Helge. Wreaking malice on thy goods,
That nothing might remain to speak of thee.

FRITHIOF

Rage burns me up! But this can wait awhile!

[*To HILDING, grimly.*]

There's more behind thy grief than blackened fields
And ruined homesteads! *Where is Ingeborg?*

HILDING

Frithiof, be patient! — Try to bear this thing! —
King Ring attacked. His shields were five to one.

THE NORSEMAN

In Disar's vale, beside the brook, they fought,—
And dyed its waters red, where she and thou
So oft have played! — Halfdan fought valiantly,—
I was full proud! — but we were vanquished.
Ing'borg was made the price —

[FRITHIOF utters a terrible cry.]

They gave her up! —
Ring would have seized the crown. — She was more dead,
Than living, in that hour! Now Ring hath led
Her home, his bride.

FRITHIOF [*Drawing his sword; with the Berserker
rage upon him; in a trumpet-like voice.*]

Now, comrades, follow me!

[THE WARRIORS gather, tumultuously, around him.
To BLAETAND.]

Where may the King be found? Is not to-night
Balder's midsummer feast?

BLAETAND [*Reluctantly.*]

Yea, in the grove,
Thou 'lt find the King preparing for the rite,
But go not thither in so rash a mood —

FRITHIOF [*Interrupting him; to his comrades.*]

Come!

THE NORSEMAN

BJÖRN

Mine is the right to 'venge thee, Frithiof !

[*They rush out, leaving HILDING and BLAETAND. The dog follows FRITHIOF.*]

HILDING

Where will this madness lead? My son ! my son !
This outworn frame how gladly would I give,
That those I love might be restored to joy !

[*To BLAETAND.*]

Give me thine arm, for I must follow him !

[*They go out ; HILDING leaning heavily upon BLAETAND.*]

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

SCENE 2. *The grove of Balder. A sacrificial altar is arranged under the great oak. A golden image of Balder, wearing FRITHIOF's ring upon its arm.*

THE PRIESTS go busily in and out of the temple. Several aged seers, with flint-stone knives in their hands, are preparing the sacrifice. HELGE, crowned, and richly appareled, is serving by the altar, with THE HIGH PRIEST. An alarm is heard without. FRITHIOF, BJÖRN, WARRIORS, and SEAMEN enter, furiously. THE PRIESTS throng out of the temple.

FRITHIOF [*To HELGE.*]

Here is the tribute I was sent to fetch
From overseas! Thou 'lt stoop to gather it,—
Thou and thy moonshine prophets! Take it—*thus!*

[*He tears the purse from his girdle, and throws it in HELGE's face; the coin is scattered in every direction. HELGE, for the moment, is half-stunned, and THE PRIESTS too startled to act. FRITHIOF catches sight of the ring, on the arm of Balder's image.*]

Why, now, bright god, who has arrayed thee thus,
In splendor stolen from a helpless maid?
Spare me thine anger,—but I take mine own!

[*He tries boldly to pull the ring from the arm of the god. It sticks fast, and becoming loosened, suddenly, the image is thrown down upon the altar, extinguishing the sacred flame. In the horror and confusion*

THE NORSEMAN

which ensue, THE PRIESTS attack FRITHIOF, with their knives, in fanatical frenzy, FRITHIOF's men, in turn, attacking THE PRIESTS.]

FRITHIOF [*Slipping the ring on his arm, and drawing his sword.*]

'T is shame for Angurvadel to dispatch
Such pallid semblances of men as you !
Betake yourselves to flight, and, while you may,
Save such poor sap as in your veins doth flow !

[*HELGE steals up behind FRITHIOF, as he speaks, and is about to stab him, but is discovered by BJÖRN, who steals upon HELGE.*]

HELGE [*Raising his knife to strike FRITHIOF.*]

So are the mouths of foul blasphemers stopped !

BJÖRN [*Stabbing HELGE.*]

And so die traitors, in their treachery !

[*HELGE falls ; BJÖRN kneels upon his body ; stabbing him.*]

This blow for Framnäs ! [*Stabbing him.*]

This, for Ingeborg !

HELGE [*Faintly.*]

I am undone ! — 'T is even as she prayed !

[*He dies.*]

THE NORSEMAN

BJÖRN [*Shouting to FRITHIOF.*]

The King is dead, and men may breathe again!

THE PRIESTS [*Terrified: taking up the cry.*]

The King is dead!

The King!

The King is slain!

[FRITHIOF *and his men drive out the panic-stricken Priests, before them; FRITHIOF'S magic sword, Angurvadel, flaming redly, in the thick of the onset. THE HIGH PRIEST, with several others, is cut off, and pursued by a WARRIOR into the temple. HILDING and BLAETAND enter.*]

HILDING

What scene is this! Great Balder's self pulled down
Upon his altar, and its flame put out!

BLAETAND [*Stooping over the body of HELGE: with a cry.*]

The King is slain!

[HILDING *falls on his knees before the altar. THE HIGH PRIEST rushes out of the temple, pursued by THE WARRIOR.*]

THE HIGH PRIEST [*Fleeing; to BLAETAND.*]

The temple burns! Pour water—water! Pour—

[BLAETAND *hastens into the temple.*]

THE NORSEMAN

HILDING

What can *I* right, an old man, of this wrong?

[*With sudden determination.*]

I can replace the god upon his throne!

[*With an access of superhuman strength, he lifts the fallen image, and replaces it upon its pedestal; then gropes blindly, and falls dead before it. FRITHIOF re-enters, hot from the pursuit.*]

FRITHIOF [*Seeing HILDING.*]

Father! What doest thou here?

[*Trying to raise him.*]

Nay — dead? Not dead?

[*He is overcome with grief.*]

The last of all my kindred! — Shall I fall
Upon this faithful blade, and make an end
Of this dark riddle of unanswered hope?
O Ing'borg, Ing'borg, wilt thou need again,
This sword to shield thee, — free thee, it may hap,
From life's imprisonment, too bitter grown?
Ye Fates make answer —

BLAETAND [*Rushing out of the temple.*]

'T is in vain! In vain!

The flames take all! The grove is summer-dried,
And soon must follow!

THE NORSEMAN

[*Seeing* FRITHIOF.]

See, the temple burns !

[*The flames begin to glow, within the temple.*]

Some priests sought sanctuary, in the shrine,
Thy Warrior caught and slew them ruthlessly,
And strewed the altar-embers all about —

[*Catching sight of* HILDING'S *body.*]

Now, what is this ! Good Hilding, speak, I pray !

FRITHIOF

Hilding will speak no more. I found him dead,
Before the feet of Balder. He had raised,
I think, the image, to its former place,
And his great heart, that urged him to the task,
Had burst in its performance. Thou wilt bear
His body safely hence ?

BLAETAND

Yea, Frithiof, yea !

I never should have left him ! Woeful day !

[*BJÖRN re-enters, in haste.*]

BJÖRN

Brother, away, away ! The priests recruit
The nobles and the townsfolk, and will soon
Cut off escape ! Our men are on the shore ;
We 'll through the wood, and join them instantly !

THE NORSEMAN

[*Aghast ; as he sees the body of HILDING, and the flames devouring the temple.*]

Good Hilding dead ! The temple set on fire !
Come ! For each moment here is perilous !

[*Grimly.*]

A fearful bale-fire this, for Balder's feast !

[*He goes out.*]

FRITHIOF [*Going.*]

Blaetand — my dog — when we approached the wood,
I drove him back. Thou 'lt find and shelter him ?

[*Smiling faintly.*]

A Viking's life, upon the rolling sea,
Would poorly suit a rangey, land-bred hound !

BLAETAND

It shall be done ! For Hilding's sake, — and thine !

[*They clasp hands, and FRITHIOF hastens out, after BJÖRN. BLAETAND raises the body of HILDING in his arms, and bears it out. HELGE'S body lies before the darkened altar. The flames begin to roar and crackle. They cast a lurid light through the grove, and play upon the image of Balder, which seems to blink and smile.*]

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

ACT IV

SCENE I. RINGRIC. *The feasting-hall in KING RING'S Palace. On a golden high-seat, at the head of the board, KING RING and INGEBORG are seated. The little PRINCE stands, sturdily, by his mother's knee. Around the board sit the COURTIERs and WARRIORs of RING. At the lower benches, the PAGEs and poor retainers. As the curtain rises, all are feasting and merry-making, save INGEBORG, who is quiet and unsmiling, except with the little PRINCE, for whom her sadness lightens.*

RING [*To INGEBORG, aside.*]

A goodly feast!

[INGEBORG *rests her head on her hand, and sighs, absently. Observing her, angrily.*]

What! sighing, evermore!

Will nothing serve to shake thy discontent?

INGEBORG [*In a low voice.*]

Have I not striven to be dutiful?

What do I leave undone?

RING

No special thing!

Yet thou dost nothing in the name of love,

THE NORSEMAN

That perfumes all life's meanest usages,
And, being absent, turns to very dross
A King's possessions !

INGEBORG [*Coldly.*]

That thou may'st not have !

Did I not freely show thee all my heart,
Before my brothers gave me unto thee ?
I have no love to give to any man,
Save Frithiof, son of Thorsten, who doth keep
The pledge and single passion of my life.

RING

This man destroyed the temple of thy god,
And slew thy brother ! Wilt thou love him still ?
In these four years, his face has not been seen !
He may be dead !

INGEBORG [*Quietly.*]

He is not dead to me !

RING [*Bitterly.*]

So be it, then ! His ghost shall evermore
Extinguish all the brightness of my house ;
Sit at my feasts ; outweigh my benefits ;
And quaff the subtle wine of my content !

[*A disturbance is heard, without. FRITHIOF enters, in
the disguise of an aged salt-burner. He is enveloped,*

THE NORSEMAN

from head to foot, in a shaggy bear-skin, and walks bent and wearily, leaning upon a heavy staff, notwithstanding which, his unusual height is apparent. He seats himself at the lowest bench, beside the door. The underlings, headed by HALVAR, the KING's jester, begin to tease and mock him.]

HALVAR

Come to the baiting! Ho, an aged bear!

[The underlings laugh boisterously, and jostle FRITHIOF. A PAGE attempts to trip his staff.]

FRITHIOF *[Catching the PAGE by the waist, and thoughtfully turning him on his head, with one hand.]*

This fellow's wit lies not within his head!

Perchance his heels are nimbler! Heels o'er head,

Take thy wit hence, young master!

[Sends him sprawling. He gets up ruefully. The rest fall back, in astonishment.]

THE CROWN PRINCE

Mother! Oh!

What noise is that? Why do they tease a bear?

[INGEBORG quiets him.]

RING *[Rising to his feet, angrily.]*

What means this uproar? Who disturbs our peace,
With common brawling?

THE NORSEMAN

HALVAR

Sire, *I* would say
That 't was *uncommon* brawling. This old man
Has more strength left, in one of his old hands,
Than half these youngsters have in both of theirs !

RING [*To FRITHIOF.*]

Greybeard, come hither. Answer when I speak.
What is thy name, and where thy fatherland ?
Why com'st thou here ?

FRITHIOF [*Approaching.*]

O King, thou askest much !

[*At his first words, INGEBORG listens intently.*]

Grief is my name. I dwell in Sorrow's land,
To thee I come, — to learn my further fate.
In bygone days, I rode the ocean free ;
A mighty ship, with sombre sails, I had ;
I lost her in the frozen seas, and now,
Grown old and weak, I get my daily bread
By burning salt. I came to thee from far,
Hearing thy fame and wisdom widely spread,
Yon grinning fools did mock me, and I paid
Their insults back. I'm grown too old for scorn !

RING

Thy bold words do not sit upon thee ill !

THE NORSEMAN

All men should honour age. Come here, by me.
Throw off thy heavy cloak, and be at ease.

[FRITHIOF *lets the bear's hide fall from him, and stands forth, gorgeously arrayed in a mantle of azure velvet, belted with a great silver girdle. He displays INGE-BORG'S ring on his bare arm; his sword hangs at his side. INGEBOG utters a cry of recognition, and recovers herself with difficulty.*]

THE CROWN PRINCE

Mother, the shining one! Is 't Balder's self?

[*In the smile that runs 'round the board, the COURTIERs recover from their astonishment. FRITHIOF beams upon the little PRINCE, who returns his look, enthralled.*]

RING

What prince art thou, that cometh so disguised?

FRITHIOF

I am a nameless and a banished man,
Unless thy portals can embrace me, so,—
Unknown, conditionless,— I must go forth,
Once more to roam about the pathless sea.

RING

Preserve what mask thou wilt. Be welcome here.

[*Motioning FRITHIOF to a seat, beside him. To the Court.*]

THE NORSEMAN

Now let the horn be blown, and I will make
My vow to Frey, this coming has delayed.

[A horn is blown, for silence, and a boar's head, decked with flowers, and holding a golden apple in its mouth, is borne in, on a great silver dish, by four PAGES. RING touches the forehead of the boar, and raises his eyes, solemnly, to heaven.]

That Viking bold, by whom, of late, the seas
Are ravaged, and our merchant-ships despoiled,
By Frey, Thor, and Almighty Odin, I
Do swear to conquer!

FRITHIOF

[Leaping up, and striking the board a ringing blow, with his sword, that makes the startled COURTIERs jump, in their places.]

Hear my vow, O King!

[He touches the boar's head.]

I swear to shield that Viking, with this blade,
From any foeman in the North arrayed.
For that he is my kinsman and my friend.
Frey, Thor, and Odin to this vow attend!

[The frightened PAGES place the boar's head on the table.]

RING *[In amazement.]*

Thy words are bold! But while thou art my guest,
Thou may'st with perfect freedom speak thy mind!

THE NORSEMAN

[*To* INGEBORG.]

Fill, for this stranger, now, a horn of wine ;
We 'll drink to his long tarrying, in our midst.

[INGEBORG *fills the mead-horn which stands before her, and carries it to* FRITHIOF. *As she offers it to him, she spills a little of the wine, as if through awkwardness, and looks him in the face, for the first time.*]

INGEBORG

Forgive me ! It was past my help !

FRITHIOF [*Tenderly ; in a low voice.*]

I know !

[*Aloud.*]

I drink the health of this most gentle Queen !

[*He empties the horn.*]

And to requite her hospitality,
So freely, to a doubtful stranger shown,
I humbly pray her to accept this ring,
In token of my deepest fealty.

[*He takes the ring from his arm, and puts it upon*
INGEBORG'S.]

INGEBORG [*Blushing with joy ; pressing the ring*
to her arm.]

She doth receive and wear it, thankfully !

[FRITHIOF *leads her, again, to her place.*]

THE NORSEMAN

RING [*To FRITHIOF, observing him intently.*]

Wilt thou not tell some tale of that far land,
From whence thou comest? Or recount some deed
Of hero-valor, to thy forbears known,
For our diversion?

FRITHIOF

Gladly, O King Ring!

I will relate the story of the gem
By wearing which, the Queen doth honor me.

[*He seats himself on the steps of the high-seat, at the feet of INGEBORG.*]

Back, through my mother's line, the ring is said
To trace its source unto the halting god, Valunder,
Who did forge and fashion it.

By plundering Sote, once, 't was stolen away,
Who, in the olden times, did cruise the sea,
Widely, through all the North; then vanished;
And rumor whispered that, on Britain's coast,
He had interred, within a lofty tomb,
Himself, his ship, and treasure.

[*The curtain falls on the moving tableau.*]

Still he found
No rest, but ever, round and round his grave —

CURTAIN

THE NORSEMAN

SCENE 2. *A terrace outside the Palace; late afternoon. Three days have elapsed, since FRITHIOF'S arrival. It is autumn, and the golden leaves are slowly falling from the linden trees, by which the terrace is shaded. A stone seat; and the rough, stone basin of a fountain. The front of the Palace is visible, on the right. A great bell, with a bell-rope, hangs over the Palace gate. The sea may be seen, in the distance, as if from above. Enter KING RING and FRITHIOF, conversing.*

FRITHIOF

Birch forests crown the summits of the hills,
And on their slopes lie waving fields of rye,
And golden barley. Many a tranquil lake
Doth hold a shining mirror to the sky.

RING

A goodly country, which, from thy account,
I should adjudge more fertile than our own.
The day is sultry! Let us rest awhile,
And mark the peaceful passing of the year.

[*Seating himself.*]

FRITHIOF [*Musing.*]

A golden prospect! Now comes on the Fall!
Far in my homeland there's a busy sprite,
Painting the forest with a hundred hues,
Where the great elk, with towering antlers reared,

THE NORSEMAN

Stalks kinglike, or doth drink his royal fill
From mountain rivulets, as cold as snow.

[RING *begins to nod.*]

The harvest of the year, — a genial time,
Touched with the sadness of departing grace!

[RING *feigns to fall asleep.*]

When shall I read thy signals on the heights,
And down the gentle valleys of my birth?

[*He discovers that the KING is asleep; coming close to him.*]

How now, does Winter lay his frosty head
Upon the breast of Autumn? Let me see!

[*Gazing closely at the KING's face.*]

So thou art he that stole away my Bride?

[*With rising anger.*]

How did'st thou dare to pluck that budding rose,
To plant upon the snow of thy decline!
She loves me! — with a passion that has grown
Resistless with its longing! First for home,
And all the recollections of her youth,
She pined, — and home! What was it but my face!
Now I have found her, can I go again,
And leave her to her longing, and fare forth,
Myself, in body, leaving here my soul,
To haunt its sorrow? By this old man's death,
All would be righted! [*His hand steals to his sword.*]

With one well-aimed stroke —

And drop him from the terrace to the sea —

THE NORSEMAN

[He creeps forward, and then, appalled at his intention, throws away his sword, which falls clattering against the basin of the fountain. RING appears to awaken.]

RING

What noise was that?

FRITHIOF

My sword fell from my hand.

[Picking it up, in confusion, and returning it to its scabbard.]

RING

Fell, or was thrown away, O Frithiof?

FRITHIOF *[Amazed.]*

Thou know'st me, who I am?

RING

I knew thee, first,
When thou did'st place the ring on Ing'borg's arm.
I chose this time to have a word with thee.
Frithiof, I wronged thee, knowing not how great
The wrong I did. Have patience, yet awhile!
Youth can afford a penitential hour,
A brief denial, at the soul's behest.
My years are many. In this golden air

THE NORSEMAN

I feel the touch and numbing chill of death
Descend upon my spirit. Be content
To voyage a little longer. Can'st thou, so?
Wilt thou be reconciled to such a course?

FRITHIOF [*After a pause.*]

I will be gone as quickly as I can,
And tempt my love, and try my soul no more.
I thank thee for thy hospitality,
And wise forbearance. I'll to find Björn,
And have my ship made ready. Fare thee well!

[*He goes out.*]

RING

Frithiof, farewell! Men call me "Wise King Ring!"
Wise! To espouse the little snow-white maid,
Who is the mate of yonder hero! Wise!
Nay, rather *mad*,—to barter for a wife
Whose heart I know not, and whose love was won
Ere ever I beheld her! It is done!

[*Going toward the Palace; with a long look around him.*]

Strange, that the earth should never seem so fair,
As when the eyes may look on it no more!

[*With a change of mood; wrathfully.*]

Nay, then! Shall I be scapegoat for this brace
Of sighing lovers! 'T was a bargain! Fair,
And understood of all! And I have kept

THE NORSEMAN

My part with strict and free conformity !
For this pale maid, shall I lay down my state,
Depose myself, and leave my single heir
To be bred up in this usurper's house ?
'T is monstrous ! 'T is a foul ingratitude !
Have I not fed her, clothed her, honoured her,
Humored her whims, been playmate to her child ?
Yet the first glance from this young rover's eyes
Dissolves me from her very consciousness,
As though the sun should bid a mist dispel !
I have lived close with virtue all my life ;
My realm doth bask in high prosperity ;
And many men, by my beneficence,
Are helped and furthered, on life's thorny way.
Shall I be slighted by these light o' loves !
I, Sigurd. King of Ringric ! By my troth,
I 'll summon forth the flower of my men,
And have this vagrant flogged from off my coast !
I 'll take a higher hand with this proud dame,
And keep more safe the honour of my house !

[*He tries to reach the rope that pulls the great bell, in the Palace gate. It just eludes his grasp. He tries to drag the stone bench toward it, but cannot stir it. He tugs at it fiercely, moves it a little, and halts, exhausted. Bitterly.*]

Old ! I am old ! Weak — futile — rusted out !
O life, how thou dost mock man, to the end !
My race is run ; my breath and pulses fail ;
Wisdom, the priceless treasure of my years,

THE NORSEMAN

Should be my bride! And yet I still pursue
Youth's phantom dream of earthly happiness!

[*Pressing his hand upon his eyes, after a pause.*]

I will go in and wrestle with this fate,
That so essays me in its crucible!

[*He goes heavily into the Palace. Enter HALVAR and
an old man "of the people."*]

THE OLD MAN

'Tis whispered, on the quays and in the town,
That it is Frithiof! Now, what say'st thou?
There is no other dragon-ship afloat
Bears such a length of keel, and how she rides
Her anchor! Like a fortress in the sea!
His crew will not be questioned. Thinkest thou
'Tis he, himself? Thou hast observed him well.

HALVAR

The King must answer that! He'll hear thy news.
Come in with me and tell thy tale to him.

[*They go in. INGEBOG and THE CROWN PRINCE
enter, by another door, from the Palace.*]

THE CROWN PRINCE [*Running along the terrace,
and looking down at the sea.*]

Oh, Mother, see the gulls! They circle so!
Why do they call and call, and never sit,
To rest themselves, upon the swinging sea?

THE NORSEMAN

INGEBORG

So they are made, my darling ! [*Aside.*] Nay, I think
That they are souls in pain ! Thus do my thoughts
Forever wheel and wheel about my grief,
Nor ever can find rest !

[*Looking tenderly at the child, who plays happily about.*]

Ah, but for thee,
Thou rainbow thing, life's knot could be untied !

[FRITHIOF *re-enters, full-armed, and ready for departure.*]

FRITHIOF [*Seeing INGEORG.*]

The gods are kind to those who purpose well !
I came to seek thee, Sunlight of my Soul !

THE CROWN PRINCE [*Throwing himself upon*
FRITHIOF.]

Now, may I feel your sword, how sharp it is ?
And will you tell me what the writings say
That shine upon it ?

FRITHIOF [*Smiling.*]

In a little while ; —

[*He takes the child in his arms, and seats him beside the fountain.*]

If thou wilt make a garland for my head,
Of these bright leaves !

THE NORSEMAN

THE CROWN PRINCE [*Delighted.*]

I'll make a splendid one!

[*He begins, busily, to make the fallen leaves into a crown. FRITHIOF draws INGEBORG to a seat, beside him.*]

FRITHIOF

Dearest—look in my face! This little hand,
That trembles so, shall rest upon my heart!
Dear Love,—to-day, I nearly slew the King.

[*INGEBORG starts up, in terror.*]

He fell asleep, upon this very spot,
And all my evil passions woke in me,
And counseled me to slay him, and I stole
Upon him, sword in hand,—then saw myself,
And threw my guilty weapon far away!
And he awoke and called me “Frithiof.”
So I may tarry at thy side no more.

[*INGEBORG, with a cry, throws herself into his arms.*]

Thou would'st not have me stain my soul, for love?
Thou would'st not have me stain my love?—O death,
Come first, and save me from that crowning sin!
O Bravest, Truest, lift that golden head,
And bid me go! There is no other way!
I'll live for thee;—now I have seen thee mine;—
I'll find a place where I may shelter thee;
I'll come again, as life doth in me dwell!
The King is old! Till one more harvest, Sweet!

THE NORSEMAN

Think of the child! We must consider him,
Before ourselves, by reason of his state,—
His helplessness. Now, thou art comforted?
Speak to me, dearest! Thou would'st have me go?

INGEBORG

My light goes with thee!— I would have thee go.
If thou dost need me, I will come to thee,
Across the world. O love me! Live for me!

THE CROWN PRINCE [*Running to them.*]

The crown is done! When wilt thou put it on?
And why does Mother weep?

FRITHIOF

O little one,
I dare not wear thy crown! The crown for thee!

[*Putting it on the child's head.*]

For me a greater thing! [*Taking INGEORG in his arms.*]

[*An alarm is heard within the Palace. FRITHIOF and
INGEBORG draw nearer, to listen. HALVAR and THE
OLD MAN rush out, followed by the terrified COURT-
IERS.*]

HALVAR [*To INGEORG*]

The King is dead!
He died upon his spear, ere we could stay him!

THE NORSEMAN

[INGEBORG *covers her face with her hands.* FRITHIOF *takes the child in his arms, to soothe him.* HALVAR, *in his motley, begins to pull the tocsin, in the Palace gate, to summon the people, who hasten up from the town and sea-front.* BJÖRN, *full-armed, and THE WARRIORS of FRITHIOF, among the first.* HALVAR *cries out, as he tolls.*]

The King is dead! The King! The King is dead!

FRITHIOF

[*When the people have assembled, and the bell is silent; placing the child on his shield, and raising him to his shoulder, with the crown of leaves still on his head.*]

The King is dead! — Behold your little King!

[*The people acclaim him, heartily.*]

I am a stranger in this land, but now,
I would announce myself to you, by name.
Frithiof, the son of Thorsten, am I called —

[*The people interrupt him with shouts of joy.*]

Framnäs, in Iceland, was my former home;
Your Queen was daughter of my father's friend,
King Bele, whose renown you all have heard.
I was betrothed to this dear Ingeborg, —

[*She takes her place beside him, proudly.*]

Who, by a trick, was stolen from my arms,
By her proud brother, who bestowed her, then,
In turn for peace, on your departed King.

THE NORSEMAN

Hither I came to see how she did fare
Among you, and it was my plan to sail,
From here, upon the morrow—

[*The child, tired of FRITHIOF'S speaking, and his strained position on the shield, leaps boldly to the ground. The people hail his fearless action with delight, as an omen of his future strength and courage.*]

THE PEOPLE

Little King!

Son of the Shield!

We will be ruled by thee!

He 'll lead us into battle!

Have no fear!

THE OLD MAN [*Coming forward, as the
spokesman of the people.*]

Frithiof, our little King, too young is he
To judge our wrongs, and lead our hosts to war.
We 'll choose thee for the regent of his house,
Before the Ting, and thou shalt be our Yarl,
Till he is grown to manhood, if thou wilt;
For we can safely trust our realm's renown
To such as thee.

[*To the people.*]

Does this express your will?

THE NORSEMAN

THE PEOPLE

Aye!

So we wish!

That Frithiof should be Yar!

THE OLD MAN

We will not offer thee what, for so long,
Has been thine own,—the love of our young Queen.
But we 'll attend your bridal-feast with joy!

[The people assent, joyfully, among themselves.]

FRITHIOF

I thank you all! And I will strive to bend,
'Round this young brow, a crown that shall endure!

[He kisses the little KING, upon the forehead, and lifts him to the shoulders of HALVAR, who bears him off triumphantly, surrounded by the COURTIERs and people.]

INGEBORG *[Calling after HALVAR.]*

Halvar, be careful!

HALVAR *[Calling back.]*

Madam, so I will!

This back shall bear him safely back to thee!

THE NORSEMAN

INGEBORG [*Looking after them, with a smile that is close to tears.*]

The little mad thing, — to be crowned a King!

FRITHIOF

Dear heart, I 'll love him, as I shall our own!

INGEBORG

O blessed one, and he will worship thee!

[BJÖRN and FRITHIOF's warriors, who have lingered behind the rest, come forward, with beaming looks, to clasp him by the hand.]

BJÖRN

Dear brother, and sweet Princess, you do know
My joy in this!

FRITHIOF [*Embracing him.*]

Björn, we know it well!
What can we do to give like joy to thee?

BJÖRN

Lend me thy ship — and these
[*Pointing to THE WARRIORS.*]

That I may sail

THE NORSEMAN

To Sognefylke, to bring back my maid.
She waits me there, I know!

FRITHIOF

With all my heart!

INGEBORG

What joy to see my Krake's face again!
Björn, I'll give thee gold, to reconcile
My brother, Halfdan, and re-build the shrine!
Wilt undertake it?

BJÖRN

And perform it, too!
Farewell! I shall return before you two
Have eyes to see that I am gone!

INGEBORG

Farewell,
Thou best of friends! Come back to us in haste!
Frithiof will put the gold upon the ship.

FRITHIOF [*To BJÖRN.*]

I will be with you, shortly, at the Ting!

[*BJÖRN and THE WARRIORS go out, INGEBOG waving them farewell. The daylight dies, and the moon, huge and golden, begins to rise out of the sea, gilding the distant ripples.*]

THE NORSEMAN

FRITHIOF [*Taking INGEBORG in his arms.*]

In one short hour, from hell to highest heaven !
My soul is dizzy with its swift ascent !

INGEBORG

To part no more ! Dear Love, can it be true ?
To part no more, until that final sleep,
From which love wakes to smile eternally ?

FRITHIOF

Yon golden moon, how often, from my deck,
I have beheld her, rising from the sea,
And solaced my poor heart with the faint joy
Of thinking that she shone, as well, on thee !

[*A fisherman sings, unseen, in his boat, on the sea,
below them.*]

*Love is forever,
Love changeth never,
Winds of the dawn, o'er the bright waters blowing,
Bear ye my dream to her !
Ripple and gleam to her,
Tide, ever-flowing !*

*Sun of the airless,
Burning and prayerless,
Noon-day, like flame on the glassy sea falling,*

